

Psychological Trauma

Psychiatrists train Muslim clerics, teachers and nurses to recognize survivors' trauma and to treat depressed or suicidal children and adults.

Some of the children cry out in the night in terror. They are panicked when they hear a toilet flush or the thumping of a helicopter flying over Banda Aceh. It reminds them of the sound of the tsunami, reaching from the sea to kill their families and friends, destroy their homes and sweep them away.

Women have come to the city's hospital with hysteria. Some people cannot sleep. When the wind blows they race out of their tents in fear of another tsunami.

Some children refuse to speak. Others cry all the time. Or wet their beds.

Some children have become aggressive or try to injure or kill themselves.

"Some people say they hear the voices of people crying out 'save me, save me,'" said a child psychiatrist, Dr. Indrati Suraputra, in a camp for hundreds of families near a television tower.

She'd come from Jakarta to train 40 teachers, community leaders and Muslim imams to look for psychological problems and "detect grave disorders like depression."

"We tell them how to listen properly and



HEALING THEATER: A Sri Lankan entertainer helps ethnic Tamil and Sinhalese children, who survived the tsunami, work together and cope with their grief and fears.



ISLAMIC PSYCHOLOGY: Imam Tengku Asmidin (right) discusses how to help traumatized children with Dr. Indrati

Suraputra, Indonesian Ministry of Health child psychiatrist, at a Banda Aceh camp for tsunami survivors.

give advice properly," said the psychiatrist. "If they detect illness they cannot cope with, such as depression and psychosis, they must refer them to community health centers. After that a doctor may refer them to a mental health hospital in Banda Aceh."

Dr. Suraputra works with groups funded by USAID—the World Health Organization and the International Organization for Migration—which are working to cope with the psychological trauma of the tsunami.

Imam Tengku Asmidin, 26, was holding a fuzzy toy animal as he stood next to Dr. Suraputra in the camp and told of the training course he had just finished.

"Now I learn to understand people better and not just give advice on religion but on psychological fields," he said.

Because the imam is one of the refugees—his wife and children survived but he lost uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces—people in the camps come to him with their problems and he gives them encouragement.

"According to my new knowledge, many have PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] and some have panic disorder—mostly women," he said. "They are turning to religion to cope. Now, with some knowledge of psychology, I'll be able to do a much better job if I have to help them."

Preventing Exploitation and Abuse

Since many children have lost one or both parents, there has been some concern about making sure that they are properly protected from anyone who might abuse them—either sending young girls to become prostitutes or sending small children to homes where they could be used as servants.

Teenaged girls and their teachers at a makeshift high school in Calang, on the west coast of Sumatra, said they had gotten invitations from residential schools in the city of Banda Aceh to send girls and boys to live and study. However the children said they did not want to go, and they said they did not know anything about these schools.

UNICEF was leading an effort by aid groups to record the number of orphans, locate any surviving relatives and ensure that all children are properly protected from any possible abuse.